



A performance audit of King County Animal Care and Control (ACC) was mandated by the King County Council in response to concerns about ACC shelter services and data reliability. The overall audit objective was to determine the extent to which the existing data systems, policies, and procedures are appropriately used to manage and carry out shelter operations, improve performance, and promote transparency and accountability.

The audit found gaps between ACC's population monitoring and management activities and recommended practices. Such gaps can result in delayed specialized care for animals with behavior or health problems that can negatively affect animal health. We also found that ACC's data system is not used to its full capability and lacks proper controls to prevent potential misuse or abuse. Problems also exist with data consistency, accuracy, and completeness such that program data are not reliable as a precise measure of shelter performance. Finally, we found that inconsistent leadership, shifts in management direction, and sustained organizational uncertainty have limited ACC's ability to make needed improvements in population monitoring and management and to use technology effectively to improve shelter operations. While ACC staff has improved some aspects of shelter operations and assert they lack sufficient resources to address some issues, we offer recommendations in a number of areas to increase the effectiveness and transparency of shelter services.

Background

King County's Animal Care and Control (ACC) program operates within the Records and Licensing Services (RALS) Division of the Department of Executive Services. ACC provides animal shelter, pet licensing, and law enforcement field services throughout King County. ACC is staffed by 45.6 full-time equivalent employees, and the 2009 budget is approximately \$5.6 million. Subsequent to completion of our audit fieldwork, the King County Executive announced plans to close the animal shelters in November 2009 and discontinue King County's animal control services effective June 2010.

Audit Objectives and Findings

The performance audit evaluated the extent to which Animal Care and Control's data systems, policies, and procedures are appropriately used to manage and carry out shelter operations, improve performance, and promote transparency and accountability. The audit objectives were to:

1. Review ACC's approaches to monitoring the shelter population including the various stages and status of animals in the shelter system.
2. Determine the reliability of ACC's shelter population statistics and performance indicators.

Principal Audit Findings:

- Despite a number of ACC efforts to improve animal care and lower euthanasia rates, we found gaps between ACC's population

monitoring and management activities and recommended practices. Without effective systems and organizational support for important animal flow activities, such gaps can result in delayed specialized care for animals with behavior or health problems that can negatively affect animal health.

- ACC's data system, Chameleon, was implemented without sufficient technical support and IT security controls. Technical resources are not being used to their full capability and the system is not adequately safeguarded against misuse or abuse. Improved controls and system oversight are needed in a number of areas to improve data consistency, accuracy, and completeness and to ensure data is reliable as a precise measure of shelter performance.
- Inconsistent leadership, shifts in management direction, and sustained organizational uncertainty have limited ACC's ability to make needed improvements in population monitoring and management and to use technology effectively to improve shelter operations. These factors have also contributed to delays in completing significant projects as well as some confusion about priorities and practices among ACC staff.

Executive Response

The County Executive concurred with all 13 of the audit recommendations.

